Empowering Practices: Writing Instruction for Reluctant Learners with Language Differences

Ryan Nelson Ph.D., CCC-SLP
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Ryan.Nelson@louisiana.edu
Abstract

• Language learning difference and disorders can contribute to reluctance and struggles with beginning writers.
• Empowering and meaningful experiences through classroom instruction fosters independence.
• Key principles for instruction with struggling writers will be demonstrated.
Extremely Reluctant Writers?

- Children who:
  - Refuse to pick up the pencil
  - Refuse to write
  - Reluctant to take risks in writing
  - Reluctant or unaware of editing
  - Are taking much longer than peers to acquire writing proficiency

- Does reluctance mean that they learn differently?
Not every student has the extrinsic and intrinsic factors required for literacy acquisition... The students with whom we work find using language as a tool for thinking and self expression very difficult... And without mediation they are at risk for academic failure, depression and an increased risk of drop out.

(Dunaway, 2014)
Cambourne’s Key Principles

• Immersion
• Demonstration
• Expectation
• Responsibility
• Use
• Approximation
• Response
• Continued Opportunity for Engagement
Writing - Constructive Process

• More than letter formation?

• More than copying?

• More than just speech in print
Purposes of Writing

- Affiliation
- Explanation
- Persuasion
- Entertainment
- Expression
- Request
- Clarify
- Thinking

- Work sheeting?
Is this how we are teaching writing, reading, spelling?

...And we wonder why children might be reluctant
Writing Development

• 2-5 yrs. interest increases (Clay, 1975)

• What does initial writing look like?

• Parallels other meaning-making manifestations
Writing Development

- Meaningful (for them) marks on the paper
- Start with drawings
- Imitation writing
- Invented writing more and more toward conventionalization
- Encourage writing while reading or grammar is developed - processes support one another
Conceptualizing Writing Skills

• “Higher Level” skills:
  – include goal setting and planning
  – content generation
  – discourse and genre knowledge
  – audience awareness
  – revising

• “Lower Level” skills:
  – handwriting
  – spelling
  – grammar
  – punctuation

  – (Berninger, 1999; Dyson 2013)
Higher Level Emerges Much Earlier. Do we foster it?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Mediational Framework: Experiences Across the Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading Activities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reading Aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Shared Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Independent Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Guided Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing Activities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Writing Aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Shared Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Independent Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Guided Writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Writing is not linear, it is cyclical with starts and stops, spurts and persistence, revisions, changes, and ongoing editing.
Initiating Can be tough…
Technique #1
Written Story Talk – Dunaway (2014)
• Class wide initiation Strategies
• Modeling
• Empowering
• Functional Revision
Technique #1a - Generating Writing: An opportunity to foster engagement

- Reading, experiencing, reflecting

- Listing
  - Topics of interest
  - Power words or illustrations – for later collaborative or individual writing

- Charting

- Webbing

- Observing – Collecting field notes
Shared Control

In order for writing to develop, children must learn to:

– Select their own topics
– Decide what is worth editing
– Critique their work
– Set their own goals

Reluctant writers will only construct these strategies if they feel safe enough to take risks
What leads to reluctance?

• Cognitive and Linguistic Differences contribute but are exacerbated when:
  – Purposes are distorted or at best overlooked
  – Instructional experience pushes the communicative function of writing aside
  – Writing often viewed as an accuracy endeavor
Facilitating Writing Improvement

In order to meet literacy needs, instruction must be:

– Contrastive
– Recursive
– Embedded in an authentic context
– Actively Engaging
– Meaningful from learner’s perspective

(Damico, Damico, Nelson, Weil, & Maxwell 2016)
Facilitating Writing Improvement

Transparently Meaningful Strategies

– Write for authentic purposes
– Keep the focus on meaningfulness and the establishment of comprehensibility
– Focus on the experience and knowledge they bring to the writing process
Dialogue Journals – a functionally recursive opportunity

Technique #2

• Write each other on a scheduled basis
• Free topic selection
• All entries are confidential
• Responds only to content of entry
• Do not correct grammatical mistakes
• Focus on communication

• Initially allow writing or drawing - must produce something
What’s Going on Here?

- Flawed conception of writing
  - Form is priority

- Shift in use of print

- Shift from aesthetics and mechanics to communication and meaning
Family Dialogue Journal Technique #3

  - Educators built *respectful relationships* with all families
  - Family involvement invitations were *linked to student learning*
  - Family involvement invitations *supported* student learning *at home*
What’s Going on Here?

• Attempting to please

• Misconceptions of Writing

• Focusing on Mechanics
What’s Going on Here?

- Writing as communication
- Writing as socialization
- Writing as inclusion
Shared Writing: Contextually Embedded Opportunities
Technique #4

- Relaxed social experience

- Observe a more competent and willing writer construct meaning with print

- Topics, meanings, and word choices are jointly negotiated

- Invited to participate
Shared Writing

• More competent writer actually holds the pencil
• Use of written cloze as interactional technique
• Editing arises out of authentic problems
• All errors need not be corrected
• Spelling and grammar taught in context of real problems
Power of Publishing
Technique #5

• Publishing is Critical
  – Mo Willems’ advice
  – Perfection isn’t the criteria

• Need a real audience
• Audience must be safe – You set this tone
• Feedback on the content and intention
Publication

- Making bound books
- Cataloged into the school library
- Displays in the classroom
- Lego Story Makers
- YouTube Author’s Channels
- In school hallways
- At local library
Interactive Component of Publication Wall

- Teachers model constructive feedback
- Post-it Notes with Comments
  - “Like”
  - Reactions
  - Questions
Conclusion

• Writing must extend throughout curriculum

• When struggles arise, when reluctance is observed the following must increase:
  – Responsiveness
  – Authenticity
  – Relevance
  – Collaboration
Contact Information

Ryan Nelson Ph.D., CCC-SLP
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
P.O. Box 43270
Lafayette, LA 70504-3170
(337) 482-6726
Ryan.Nelson@louisiana.edu